

Blackbird-Millington Corridor Conservation Area Plan

Monitoring & Measuring Success

An effective plan for monitoring the success of conservation efforts in the Corridor requires periodically measuring the direct results of strategic actions changes in threats, and change target viability indicators. It also requires establishing roles and responsibilities for monitoring, and establishing a timeline for monitoring activities.

Measuring Indicators

Conservation targets and the indicators used to measure conservation progress in the Corridor over time were largely established through viability analysis (See Figure 4 for a summary of indicators and thresholds.) To measure progress using viability indicators, the analysis needs to be periodically re-run using updated data on the conditions of each attribute, and incorporating new data collected through research (See *Strategies for Learning: Research*.). Most indicators were designed to use data likely to be available over time (primarily GIS data) precisely for the purpose of monitoring. In Figure 38 the information used in viability analysis is listed, and suggestions made for collecting new or improved information to success over time, in accordance with the timeline discussed below.

To measure progress on abating threats in an informative way is more difficult. Because increases and decreases in threats like development can be influenced by many factors outside of our control – such as population growth, the economy, politics – it is virtually impossible to directly and confidently attribute the results of threat measurements to strategic actions and their outcomes within a short period of time. However, threat abatement can be evaluated to some extent by measuring increases or decreases in threats (for example, by measuring acres of forest lost to development) and by measuring the results of specific strategies or actions (for example, by measuring the amount of land protected by the new Forested Land Easement Program.) Figure 38 also includes some suggestions for the information that could be collected (and discussed by team members) to monitor threats and strategy outcomes over the next five years, in accordance with the timeline suggested below.

Monitoring Timeline & Activities

The last charge of the Core Science team in the conservation planning process was to provide input on the time frame for measuring progress and achieving objectives. The general consensus was that the bulk of objectives could be met (or at least be put into action) in 5 years with aggressive action and commitment, but that it would take up to ten years before reforestation efforts would provide any significant benefits and for protection to be fully achieved, and at least fifty years before reforestation would provide benefits to mature forest habitat indicators. To support this timeline, target viability and threats should be fully re-examined in five years. The following monitoring events were determined to be appropriate to supporting and measuring Corridor success.

One-Year-Out. Because there are still many outstanding data needs that could be used to improve Corridor analysis and inform strategies and objectives, convening partners to check-in on progress and

gather and incorporate research results in the plan is imperative. Given the newness of this effort, it would be preferable not to wait too long to do this. While a "year-out" workshop might be too soon to get the results of some research efforts, it could be critical for maintaining momentum and making sure strategy implementation is off to a good start. The goal of this workshop would be to gather new data, assess new capacity or issues that arise, and help insure a good start on strategy implementation.

Three-Years-Out. By three years out, many of the outstanding data/research needs should be filled or resolved. Partners should be well-engaged in their strategic actions and be able to report on challenges and some preliminary results. A re-assessment of threats and the identification of follow-up strategies to some of the original strategies could be useful or necessary to keep moving conservation efforts forward.

Five-Years-Out. At five years out, most (if not all) of the original strategies should be complete, or at least successfully underway and producing results. At this point, partners should be able report substantially on the results and outcomes of their efforts, and data/information should be collected and utilized to measure direct results and re-evaluate threats and re-run viability analysis (although contributions toward long-term goals like forest maturity will still not likely be reflected in viability analysis.) At this point, new strategies will need to be developed (building on original strategies and new opportunities and threats) to carry this effort into the future, and a new timeline of monitoring activities established.

Ten-Years-Out. At ten years out, reforestation efforts should be providing benefits, protection should be completed and efforts shifted almost entirely to management. By this time education efforts could be having an effect on behavior and values.

50-Years-Out. By 50 years out, management for maturity will be the focus. Ongoing vigilance to identify invasions by exotic species, new threats, and challenges to conservation will be the most crucial efforts. By this time institutionalization of conservation values could be achieved.

Monitoring Roles & Responsibilities

As facilitator of the planning effort, The Nature Conservancy is well-positioned to periodically update target viability analysis for the Corridor, with the assistance of partners – especially the USFWS Delaware Bay Estuary Project, for forest zonal thickness and patch isolation analysis – and to measure Corridor-wide increases/decreases in common threats over time, if efforts to create a Corridor Coordinator position with GIS support are successful.

With so many partner organizations, agencies, and individuals involved in different strategic actions, each entity must be expected to track the results of its efforts on an ongoing basis. However, having some protocol or venue for regular communication and for collecting and analyzing the combined results periodically is imperative. The most effective way to gather and compile these results would be via a periodic forum (such as the workshops mentioned in the timeline above) at which partner organizations report on and discuss these results and from which a coordinating entity could compile them and report back the combined results to partners. Coordinating monitoring efforts and convening partners to collect and measure information on progress/success is another crucial role that could be filled by a Corridor Coordinator. A committee structure that empowers key partners to lead strategy

implementation efforts could be a valuable addition (or substitute, in the absence of a Coordinator) for moving critical strategies forward and maintaining partners and community communication and involvement.